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'Scarlet' Mongolian cherry

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'Scarlet' Mongolian cherry

'Scarlet' Mongolian cherry (*Prunus fruticosa* Pallas) is a small suckering shrub that produces glossy foliage and an abundance of cherrylike fruit. It is recommended for the outside rows of multirow farmstead windbreaks and for wildlife plantings. Deer browse the tips of stems, and raccoon, squirrel, and grouse eat the fruit.

Scarlet was released in 1983 by the Soil Conservation Service (SCS) in cooperation with the State agricultural experiment stations of Minnesota, North Dakota, and South Dakota.

Description

Scarlet Mongolian cherry grows to a mature height of 4 to 6 feet in 15 to 20 years. Crown width is 10 to 15 feet, and Scarlet may form a dense thicket more than 20 feet wide.

Scarlet has smooth, slender branchlets. The shiny, dark-green leaves are 1 to 1 3/4 inches long and 1/2 to 3/4 inch wide. They range from egg shaped to lance shaped. The white flowers bloom in May, and fruit ripens in July. It is about 1/2 inch in diameter, red to purplish red, and very tart.

Mongolian cherry was introduced in Canada from Mongolia in 1938. Scarlet originated from open-pollinated seed collected in 1954 at the Canadian Department of Agriculture's research station in Morden, Manitoba. Seedlings for advanced testing were established at the SCS Plant Materials Center in Bismarck, North Dakota.

Adaptation

Scarlet is adapted in the area of the northern Great Plains shown on the map. It flourishes on deep and moderately deep loamy and silty soils that are well or moderately well drained or that are poorly or very poorly drained and have a high water table. It also performs well on deep loamy and sandy soils that are well or moderately well drained and have moderate available water capacity. Scarlet is winter hardy where average annual minimum temperature ranges from -40 to -20° F.

Mean survival of Scarlet ranges from 60 to 90 percent under field conditions. Competition from weeds can greatly affect performance. The establishment rate is affected by



A row of Scarlet Mongolian cherry 4 years after seedlings were planted. The shrubs are about 4 feet tall and 6 feet wide.

drought, wildlife use, and adverse soil conditions such as coarse texture, low available water capacity, and alkalinity.

Seed production is good to excellent. This trait and the strong suckering habit, dense foliage, and high rate of survival are valuable conservation characteristics in which Scarlet is equal or superior to comparable species such as sand cherry and Nanking cherry. Scarlet has no apparent insect or disease problems.

Establishment

Cultivate the site and keep it fallow for at least 1 year before planting seedlings of Scarlet Mongolian cherry.

Plant the seedlings in spring as soon as the ground thaws, when soil moisture is high. The recommended spacing between seedlings in the row is 3 to 4 feet. Use 2-year-old seedlings that are 12 to 24 inches tall and have a stem diameter of 3/16 to 1/2 inch just above the root collar.

Control weeds by mechanical cultivation for 5 or 6 years. Scarlet forms a solid stand and begins producing fruit in 3 or 4 years.

Area of adaptation of Scarlet Mongolian cherry



Propagation

Propagate Scarlet from seed. Mature fruit can be collected in July. Process the fruit by wet maceration, and store the seed under cool, dry conditions.

Seed can be planted in fall or spring. For spring planting, stratify the seed for 120 days in damp sand at 41° F. Plant 10 to 15 viable seeds per square foot, and cover with 1/2 to 3/4 inch of soil.

Availability

The SCS Plant Materials Center (P.O. Box 1458, Bismarck ND 58502) maintains breeder seed and foundation stock of Scarlet Mongolian cherry. Certified seed is available from growers approved by your State certified seed department. Standards for all classes of seed are published in the North Dakota Tree and Shrub Certification Standards.

For more information on availability and use of Scarlet Mongolian cherry, contact your local SCS office. It is listed in your telephone directory under "U.S. Government, Department of Agriculture." Assistance is available without regard to race, creed, color, sex, or national origin.

